

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

1. A NOTE ON THE LATEX LICKING HABIT OF FIVE-STRIPED AND THREE-STRIPED PALM SQUIRRELS¹SATISH KUMAR SHARMA²¹Accepted February 22, 2005²Foundation for Ecological Security, 18, New Ahinsapuri, Fatehpura, Udaipur 313 001, Rajasthan, India.

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Information about the food habits of the Five-striped Palm Squirrel (*Funambulus pennanti*) and Three-striped Palm Squirrel (*F. palmarum*) comes from the work of Balasubramanian (1989, 1995), Barnett and Prakash (1975), Gupta and Agarwal (1968), Harit (1996), Mathew and Lukose (1995), Prater (1980), Sadakathulla and Kareem (1995) and Tiwari (1990). These squirrels primarily feed on fruits, nuts, young shoots, buds and bark. The Five-striped Palm Squirrel sometimes also feeds on birds (Harit 1996; Mathew and Lukose 1995; Tiwari 1990); the Three-striped Palm Squirrel even feeds on nectar and insects (Balasubramanian 1989; Prater 1980). Cannibalism has been recorded in both the Five-striped (Gupta and Agarwal 1968) and Three-striped Palm Squirrels (Sadakathulla and Kareem 1995).

During my field studies in various parts of Rajasthan, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka between 1996 and 2005 (Table 1), I found *F. pennanti* and *F. palmarum* licking

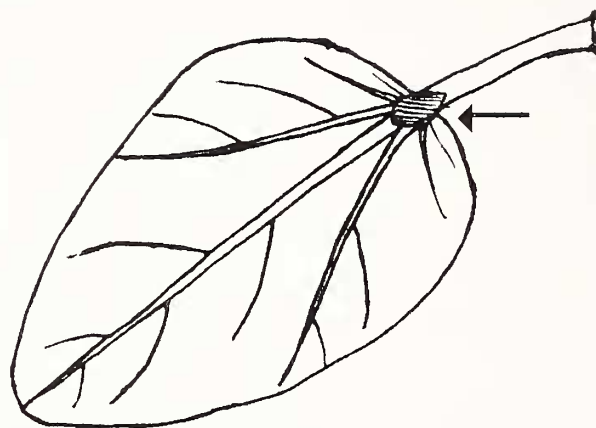


Fig. 1: Position on the abaxial surface of the leaf of *Ficus benghalensis* licked by squirrels

latex from the leaves of *Ficus benghalensis*. The latex is procured from the furcating point of basal veins at the abaxial surface of leaves (Fig. 1). Both the squirrels move quickly on

Table 1: Details of latex licking of *Ficus benghalensis* leaves by striped squirrels

Date of observation	Locality of observation	No. of leaves licked
<i>Funambulus pennanti</i>		
30.viii.1996	Brahminoka-Khairwara (Jhadol tehsil, Udaipur district, Rajasthan)	400
1.ix.1996	Madri (Jhadol tehsil, Udaipur district, Rajasthan)*	1000
29.viii.2002	Polo Forest (Vanaj, Gujarat)	700
27.xi.2004	Patauda (Jhajjar district, Haryana)	249
10.xi.2004	Chitrawas (Gogunda tehsil, Udaipur district, Rajasthan)	100
3.i.2005	Banswara (Rajasthan)	200
<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>		
26.ix.2004	Kokkanti Cross (Kadiri taluka, Annantpur district, Andhra Pradesh)	100
26.ix.2004	Thimmama Merry Manu (Kadiri taluka, Annantpur district, Andhra Pradesh)**	500
27.xi.2004	Royalpadu (Kolar district, Karnataka)	295***

* Largest Banyan tree of Rajasthan

** Largest Banyan tree of the world

*** Only very young leaves were not licked

the extremities of branchlets to lick the latex from every mature leaf. A gentle gnawing and/or licking at the vein furcating point of the leaf initiates the flow of latex. Once the latex begins to flow, the squirrels lick it and go to another leaf and this action is then repeated. A scar of dried latex could be seen on the underside of every licked leaf. The fresh scars are whitish, while old dried scars are dirty white or black. Presence of a latex-scar on the underside of a leaf is indicative of it having been tapped by a squirrel. This behaviour of squirrels is commonly seen in various parts of the country (Table 1).

The latex probably provides nutrition to squirrels; it seems that the squirrels procure water, minerals and organic nutrition from the latex.

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2. STRANDING OF A SPERM WHALE *PHYSETER MACROCEPHALUS* (LINNAEUS 1758) ON THE CHENNAI COAST¹

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Whales are the most dominant marine mammals of Order Cetacea. They are mostly denizens of temperate and polar oceanic waters, but they do migrate to tropical waters for breeding and/or escaping extreme climatic conditions during certain seasons (Corbett and Hill 1992). However, not all whales that are denizens of temperate and polar oceanic waters migrate to tropical waters, e.g. the Bowhead Whale *Balaena mysticetus*, Bryde's Whale *Balaenoptera edeni* are believed to live primarily in tropical and subtropical waters all the year round. There is no evidence of their migration away from these regions. The body of the whale is protected by a thick layer of oil rich blubber beneath the skin, which acts as a thermal insulator, a store of energy for long migrations, and plays an important role for maintaining its hydrostatic buoyancy. Whales are usually found in the upper few metres of the sea, but are capable of extensive deep dives. Depending

on the presence of teeth or baleen plates, whales are classified as toothed (Odontoceti) or baleen whales (Mysticeti). Toothed whales mostly feed on fishes and cephalopods, while baleen whales mostly feed on plankton such as euphausiids, by a filter-feeding mechanism, and sometimes pelagic fishes and cephalopods (Bensam and Menon 1996).

Stranding of a Sperm Whale on the Chennai Coast

A Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus* Linn. was stranded on the Chennai coast, behind Napier's Bridge (13°06'N, 80°18'E), in the early hours of January 21, 2002. It was a male, measuring about 995 cm long, and weighing about 3 tons. The animal had injuries throughout the caudal region, which could have been caused by the propeller of fishing boats. In general, however, the animal was in good condition with all specific characteristic features.